

Quoting from a Short Story

When you write about a short story or refer to a short story in a literary response journal or an essay, you will frequently need to quote from it. Below are some rules to follow when you refer to the title of a story or quote words from it. All the examples given in the rules are taken from the short story “Test” by Theodore Thomas.

RULE 1: *Whenever you mention the title of a short story, put quotation marks around it.*

Robert Proctor, the protagonist in “Test,” by Theodore Thomas, fails his driving test because he doesn’t understand the rules.

RULE 2: *Whenever you quote an uncommon word or a longer phrase that appears in the story, put quotation marks around it and INTEGRATE the quoted material within your own sentence.*

Robert’s compassionate nature is revealed in his concern for what might have happened to the sleeping girl. He knows that, had the accident been real, she would have passed unknowingly “into the dark, heavy sleep of death.”

RULE 3: *Whenever you quote a phrase that uses only part of a longer sentence, indicate where words have been omitted by using AN ELLIPSIS.*

One of the most startling images in the story occurs in the last paragraph when the two men drag “Robert Proctor out the door...his rubber heels sliding along the two grooves worn into the floor.”

RULE 4: *Whenever you quote two or more whole lines from the story, do not use quotation marks unless they enclose dialogue. Instead, write the lines from the story on separate, indented lines within your paragraph. When several lines are cited, they should be especially significant.*

You should “set up” the quote by introducing it and justify such a long quote by explaining its importance afterwards “saying goodbye”).

The theme of the story is revealed in the final interchange between Robert and the uniformed man. Robert says,

“You can’t really mean this, I’m still dreaming aren’t I? This is still part of the test isn’t it?”

The uniformed man said, “How do any of us know?”

The author is saying that we never know when a seemingly simple action, like driving down a freeway, will have serious consequences. Our ability to make wise decisions may be tested at any time.

ACTIVITIES: Use the assigned story. Answer on a separate page

1. Write a sentence that explains what this story is about. Use the title of the short story and the author in your sentence.
2. In another sentence, discuss the main character and point out how some specific words or phrases from the story help reveal the way the personality of the character.
3. In another sentence, point out a striking image in the story. Quote a phrase that uses only part of a longer sentence and indicate where words have been omitted by using an ellipsis correctly.
4. In a sentence that comments on your opinion about the theme of the story, quote a passage that is longer than two lines. Be sure to “set up” the quote and to “say goodbye” by explaining it afterwards.